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FM AMCONSUL HAMBURG  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HAMBURG 000035

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BREMEN STATE ELECTION - SPD REMAINS STRONG WITH THE GREENS  
AS CLEAR WINNERS

REF: HAMBURG 031

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¶1. (U) Summary. Though Bremen's election gave the current Social Democratic -Christian Democratic (SPD-CDU) government enough votes to continue in office, the two parties each lost votes over 2003. The smaller parties all gained votes, with the best results scored by the left-of-center Greens and the new Left Party (Linke). Local factors will primarily drive the formation of a new coalition by the SPD (the largest party); the party appears to be leaning toward a coalition with the Greens. Nationally, the SPD would (unofficially) welcome the end of a Grand Coalition. However, the shift of voters from the SPD to other parties, especially the Linke, will be of long-term concern. End Summary.

#### Summary of Results

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¶2. (U) Bremen's voters turned out in record low numbers (57.8 percent) to elect their state parliament on May 13. The current government, a grand coalition of Social (SPD) and Christian (CDU) Democrats suffered a blow, with the SPD down 5.5 percent over 2003 to 36.8 percent of the vote (33 parliamentary seats) and the CDU down 4 percent, taking 25.6 percent of the vote and 23 seats. The two remain, however, the first and second biggest parties in the parliament. The Greens and the Left Party (Linke) were the main winners in the elections. The Greens took 16.4 percent of the vote (14 seats), up 3.6 percent from 2003. The Linke's 8.4 percent of the vote secured the party its first-ever seats (7) in a western German state parliament. The FDP received 5.9 percent (5 seats) up 1.8 percent from 2003 and the far-right German Popular Union (Deutsche Volksunion - DVU) retained its one seat in the state parliament.

#### A City of the Left

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¶3. (U) In discussions with Hamburg's Pol/Econ Off prior to the elections, Bremen representatives from all parties intoned again and again how "left" the Bremen electorate was, which over the years has influenced policy-making by all of the parties in Germany's smallest state. Indeed, voters in the city-state of Bremen/Bremerhaven showed their "leftist" leanings at the polls on May 13. The SPD, which has governed in Bremen since the end of World War II, continues as the city-state's strongest party with 36.8 percent of the vote. This number was significantly down from the 42.3 percent the SPD received in the 2003 state elections and was not the boost that SPD leadership in Berlin had hoped to help improve the party's national standing. However, it was a stronger showing than the 33 percent the party

received in 1995, which led it to form a grand coalition with the CDU. SPD Mayor Jens Boehrnsen will now have to choose to continue 12 years of a grand coalition or form a "red-green" coalition with the Green party. While the numbers do not add up for a "red-red" coalition, Boehrnsen and national SPD representatives have made it clear that a coalition with the Linke would not be considered. Over the next two weeks the SPD will begin exploratory talks with both the CDU and Greens.

¶4. (U) The CDU was also "punished" by voters in Sunday's elections. In post election press, CDU party leaders blame the poor performance on the SPD's failure to announce whether or not the grand coalition would be continued. Although in an April 26 poll 54 percent of those asked stated that they favored a continuation of the SPD-CDU coalition, voters displayed their displeasure at the grand coalition's performance by turning to the Greens, the FDP, and the Linke. The Greens have long been a power in Bremen (they entered a state parliament for the first time in Bremen in 1979) and on May 13 they obtained their best results in any state election to date. According to the polling institute Infratest-dimap, the Greens drew the majority of their new voters from previous SPD voters. The Greens top candidate, Karoline Linnert, has claimed that her party's strong turnout is a mandate for them to be part of a governing coalition. The left-wing Linke, composed of disgruntled trade unionists, former SPD members, and members of the ex-Communist PDS, was also a big winner, entering a "western" state parliament for the first time. The Linke was able to motivate protest voters as well as the unemployed and it drew a quarter of its vote from people who had cast ballots for the SPD in 2003. Its voters indicated that social justice issues were of high importance and over 91 percent were displeased with the work of the Bremen Senate (Infratest-dimap). The national Linke invested heavily both financially and with volunteers in the Bremen elections and the party may pose a new challenge to the SPD in 2008 elections in Hamburg and Lower Saxony.

¶5. (U) All of the smaller parties benefited from the low voter turn-out, which made it easier for them to overcome the 5 percent hurdle to enter the state parliament. Though not

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dramatic, both the Liberals (FDP) and far-right German Popular Union (DVU) slightly increased their share of the vote. The FDP was able to return to the legislature in caucus strength. The DVU retained its one seat (acquired because of a quirk in Bremen law).

Comment  
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¶6. (SBU) Comment: It will take several weeks before the SPD finalizes a coalition agreement with either the CDU or Greens and its choice could affect federal policy-making. SPD officials have been dropping hints about shifting to the Greens. However, the CDU hopes that budgetary concerns will influence the SPD to opt to maintain the grand coalition in hopes of receiving budgetary support from the federal government. Moreover, while Bremen only holds 3 seats in the Bundesrat, the federal grand coalition would lose the two-thirds majority it currently holds in the body if the SPD were to select a "red-green" coalition. In order to pass legislation requiring two-thirds majority, such as the on-going Federalism Reform II negotiations through which Bremen hopes to improve its financial situation (e.g. through tax reforms) or constitutional amendments, the SPD and CDU would have to convince a state in which a federal opposition party is in power to vote in favor of the legislation.

¶7. (SBU) The more indirect impact of the election - its impact on the SPD - will not be clear for several weeks. The SPD's loss of seats can be attributed to a number of local factors - voter fatigue with a 12-year-old government, persistent high unemployment, a by-all-accounts uninspiring campaign. However the loss of voters to other parties of the left, and especially the Linke's success may also convey a deeper message. An

already insecure SPD may decide it needs to polish its "socialist" credentials. While Bremen cannot be regarded as a model for national politics in Germany, its election on May 13 may be a signal of a more contentious future for the national grand coalition. End Comment.

18. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.  
BUTCHER